

Robert Ralston House
521 Arch Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1016

HABS
PA
51-PHILA
246-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
120 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

ROBERT RALSTON HOUSE

HABS
PA
51-PHILA
246-

Street Address or Location: 521 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia
County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: Demolished August, 1959

Brief Statement of
Significance: An example of a brick row house of the
first half of the nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: On December 1, 1795, Richard H. Morris sold the site of this house to Robert Ralston. At this time the lot, upon which was a "messuage," measured 24 feet, 9 inches by 306 feet. Ralston also acquired a lot adjoining on the west in 1804. The house must have been erected some time after this since it stood on the original lot and part of the second, being 27 feet wide. Ralston died about 1838 and the property passed to John Proudfit, described as a New York Clergyman, and his wife Abigail, Ralston's daughter. The Proudfits sold the property shortly thereafter (March 9, 1839) to John Dalzell, a Merchant. This transfer included a "three story brick dwelling house back buildings Coach House stables ..." [Deed Book GS 1, p. 81] After one year the property again changed owners when, on April 3, 1840, Elijah Wansyckel, a Merchant, acquired it. [Deed Book GS 15, p. 13] The next known deed is one of September 22, 1856, when Richard H. Townsend, a Physician, sold the property to Isaac Jeans, Merchant, for \$18,500. [Deed Book RDW 94, 399] The circumstances of Townsend's acquiring the house are unknown. The property remained in Jeans' estate until 1920.
 2. Date of erection: Between 1804 and 1838
 3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc.: Unknown
 4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Unknown
 5. Notes on alterations and additions: None known
 6. Important old views: None known
- References: Deed Books of City of Philadelphia: Registry
of Deeds, City Hall, Philadelphia, Pa.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: None of importance known.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: None known.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: An example of a three-and-a-half story brick city row house of the first half of the nineteenth century. The Greek Revival details of the first floor front, the variety of handsome mantelpieces, and the fine ironwork of the entrance stoop are all of unusual merit.
2. Condition of fabric: Demolished August, 1959.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Unknown
2. Foundations: Unknown
3. Wall construction: Brick; south elevation laid in Flemish bond.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Stone stoop before entrance, five steps high, with handsome ironwork railing.
5. Chimneys: One brick chimney at west party wall.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Front entrance doorway surrounded by wood frontispiece of flat pilasters supporting rectangular entablature and cornice. Glazed door with rectangular transom above.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Large glass window on first story flanked by flat wood pilasters supporting a narrow cornice. Three rectangular window openings on second and third stories with stone [?] lintels. Wood window sash, six over six light, double hung; shutter pintles remain.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Low pitch gable roof, ridge parallel to street, original roofing material unknown.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Unknown
 - c. Dormers, cupolas: One gable-roofed and pedimented dormer faces south, with an arch-head, nine over six light, double hung window and flanking pilasters.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Unknown

2. Stairways: Unknown
3. Flooring: Unknown
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls and ceiling; original finish unknown.
5. Doorways and doors: First floor front--Greek Revival door frames. Doorway to rear room--two doors flanked by flat pilasters without moldings but narrowing to carved wood Ionic capitals and supporting flat entablature and coved cornice. Squarish transom above each door. Door to stair and entrance hall--pilaster trim of simple profile with square "doorbell" moldings at upper corners of wood surrounding plaster foliage. Door missing.
6. Trim: See doors
7. Hardware: Unknown
8. Lighting: Electric
9. Heating: Fireplace, first floor front--plain mantelpiece of black marble. Fireplace, second floor--black marble mantelpiece (later painted white) composed of freestanding Ionic columns flanking fireplace opening and supporting simple mantel. Iron fireback and jambs. Fireplace, third floor--Federal style wood mantelpiece, fireplace opening framed in marble, iron fireback.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House faces south; one of a row of buildings on north side of Arch Street.
2. Enclosures: None
3. Outbuildings: None
4. Walks, driveways, etc.: None
5. Landscaping, gardens, etc.: None

Prepared by James F. O'Gorman, Architect
National Park Service - August 1959